

Message Text

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PAGE 01 STATE 041602
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SUBJECT: AAA NEWS RELEASE RE TOURIST SAFETY

FOR YOUR INFORMATION THERE IS TRANSMITTED BELOW TEXT OF
AAA NEWS RELEASE. DEPARTMENT'S COMMENTS FOLLOW IN SEPTTEL.

QUOTE: MEXICO, AAA AGREE ON PLAN OF ACTION TO INCREASE
TOURIST SAFETY, COMFORT

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PAGE 02 STATE 041602

WASHINGTON, D.C., FEB. 17--MEXICO'S PRESIDENT JOSE
LOPEZ PORTILLO HAS AGREED WITH THE AMERICAN AUTOMOBILE
ASSOCIATION ON A SUBSTANTIVE, WIDE-RANGING PROGRAM TO
IMPROVE SIGNIFICANTLY THE SAFETY AND COMFORT OF AMERICANS
TRAVELING IN MEXICO.

IN A BLAIR HOUSE MEETING LAST NIGHT WITH AAA PRESIDENT

J. B. CREAL, THE MEXICAN PRESIDENT COMMITTED HIS ADMINISTRATION, IN CONSULTATION WITH THE 31 MEXICAN STATES AND THE FEDERAL DISTRICT, TO PUTTING INTO EFFECT "WITHIN TWO WEEKS" CERTAIN AAA RECOMMENDATIONS, SOME OF WHICH WERE SIMULTANEOUSLY PROPOSED BY MEXICO'S TOURISM MINISTRY, ALONG WITH OTHER MEASURES.

LOPEZ PORTILLO ACCEPTED CREAL'S PLAN OF ACTION TO:

-- ESTABLISH A HIGH-LEVEL ADMINISTRATION OFFICE TO OFFER A COMPLETE TOURIST AID SYSTEM.

-- INSTALL A HOTLINE LOCAL AND LONG DISTANCE TELEPHONE SERVICE MANNED BY BILINGUAL AUTHORITIES TRAINED TO ASSIST TOURISTS WITH WHATEVER PROBLEMS THEY MAY ENCOUNTER.

-- DEVELOP NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR POLICE HANDLING OF TOURIST ARRESTS AND DETENTION.

-- SET STIFF PENALTIES FOR BRIBERY -- THE "MORDIDAS" SOMETIMES REQUESTED BY POLICE AND OTHER OFFICIALS TO SETTLE TOURIST PROBLEMS.

-- ALLOW USE OF CITIZENS BAND RADIOS. (THREE CHANNELS ARE TO BE ASSIGNED FOR INFORMATION REQUESTS, EMERGENCIES, CONTACT WITH MOTOR VEHICLE CARAVANS AND OTHER NEEDS.)

-- ESTABLISH TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR CUSTOMS OFFICIALS TO ELIMINATE HARASSMENT AND REDUCE TOURIST INCONVENIENCE.
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PAGE 03 STATE 041602

-- PROVIDE AAA DIRECT ACCESS TO HIGH-LEVEL MEXICAN AUTHORITIES IN ORDER TO HELP RESOLVE SERIOUS TOURIST PROBLEMS.

LOPEZ PORTILLO ALSO APPROVED ESTABLISHMENT OF ATTORNEYS FOR THE DEFENSE OF "THE TOURIST AS A CONSUMER" IN MAJOR CITIES AND AT U.S.-MEXICO BORDER TOWNS.

LOPEZ PORTILLO AND MEXICO'S SECRETARY OF TOURISM GUILLERMO ROSSELL DE LA LAMA SAID THAT AAA WOULD BE NOTIFIED IMMEDIATELY AS EACH OF THE TOURISM PROGRAMS TAKES EFFECT SO THAT THE MOTORING AND TRAVEL FEDERATION COULD ADVISE ITS 18.5 MILLION MEMBERS AND OTHER AMERICAN TRAVELERS.

AN ESTIMATED 3.3 MILLION AMERICANS WILL TRAVEL INTO THE INTERIOR OF MEXICO AND SPEND 1.95 BILLION DOLLARS THIS YEAR, AAA SAID. MILLIONS MORE WILL VISIT BORDER TOWNS.

MANY WILL PASS THROUGH AAA'S FOUR BORDER OFFICES IN BROWNSVILLE, LAREDO AND EL PASO, TEX., AND NOGALES, ARIZ.

OTHER SUBSTANTIVE STEPS PROPOSED BY ROSSELL DE LA LAMA AND ACCEPTED LAST NIGHT BY LOPEZ PORTILLO FOR IMPLEMENTATION WITHIN TWO WEEKS INCLUDE:

-- "THE ALMOST COMPLETE ELIMINATION" OF CUSTOMS

INSPECTION AT INTERNATIONAL AIRPORTS AND AT BORDER CROSSINGS BY AUTOMOBILE TRAVELERS.

-- "100 PERCENT STRENGTHENING AND ENLARGEMENT" OF THE GREEN ANGEL MOBILE UNITS ASSISTING TOURISTS TRAVELING BY CAR ON MAJOR TRAFFIC ARTERIES, ESPECIALLY HIGHWAY 15 WHICH HAS BEEN THE SCENE OF SERIOUS CRIMES AGAINST TOURISTS IN RECENT MONTHS.

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PAGE 04 STATE 041602

-- MODERNIZATION AND EXPANSION OF AUTO SERVICE BY GASOLINE STATIONS ON PRINCIPAL HIGHWAYS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY.

-- OPENING OF ADDITIONAL AIRPORTS TO GENERAL AVIATION.

-- MAKING TOURIST CARDS REQUIRED FOR ENTRY INTO MEXICO WIDELY AVAILABLE THROUGH AAA AND OTHER TRAVEL ORGANIZATIONS.

CREAL SAID THAT IN THE PAST FEW MONTHS THERE HAS BEEN A CLIMATE OF UNCERTAINTY AND APPREHENSION AMONG AMERICAN TOURISTS THINKING ABOUT DRIVING INTO MEXICO. "WE HOPE THAT WHEN PRESIDENT LOPEZ PORTILLO'S COMMITMENT BECOMES A REALITY, THE MISGIVINGS WILL DISAPPEAR," CREAL SAID.

THE MEETING BETWEEN LOPEZ PORTILLO AND THE AAA PRESIDENT EVOLVED FROM A DECEMBER LETTER CREAL WROTE TO THE MEXICAN PRESIDENT ASKING HIM TO "DO ALL THAT YOU CAN

TO ELIMINATE (TOURISM HAZARDS) AND MAKE TRAVEL INTO MEXICO THE REWARDING CULTURAL EXPERIENCE THAT IT SHOULD BE." END QUOTE.

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